

SENATE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS

Jobs for Today — Prosperity for Tomorrow: The Senate Democratic Plan

Senate Democrats believe that we must make sure that economic recovery translates into real economic growth.

As we dig out of this recession, we must plant the seeds that will produce ongoing economic opportunity for families, workers, businesses and communities.

The Senate Democrats' agenda for prosperity will produce that growth through three fundamental principles:

- 1. give workers the skills they need to get jobs now,**
- 2. make smart investments in tomorrow's economy, and**
- 3. create a faster, focused government.**

The 9-Point Plan

- Increase capital spending on higher education/K-12 facilities.
- Increase funding for high-demand college enrollments and faculty retention.
- Fully fund worker re-training program allowing people to compete for available jobs.
- Increase training slots in "high cost" fields with critical workforce needs, such as nursing.
- Expand successful program that combines vocational training with English as a Second Language.
- Enhance Economic Development Commission to coordinate policy and increase accountability.
- Speed bringing new technologies to market so we have an advantage in emerging sectors.
- Speed state and local permitting through timelines and incentives.
- Expand state efforts to increase international tourism and trade.

Worker Training

We need jobs now. First, we need to make investments that put our people back to work. Second, our worker training programs need to provide the skills demanded by a global economy. As the demographics of our work force change, we need to change our approach. Finally, because of the rapid changes in the global economy, training will be a lifelong effort. We need first-class educational facilities that will meet the needs of our workers.

Expand VESL – “Vocational English as a Second Language” Training. Our population is changing. A recent study notes that today 30 percent of Washington residents younger than 5 are Hispanic; in some Eastern Washington counties the number is more than 70 percent. That demographic shift is fueling demand for bilingual services, such as health care. Historically, adult learners would take English as a Second Language first, then proceed to vocational training. Research has shown that combining these elements is better for both students and employers, because students get the skills and the vocabulary they need to succeed on the job – and they get through school much faster.

Maintain current worker retraining funding. Demand for worker retraining continues to outstrip available slots. Senate Democrats increased the number of available training slots in the last budget. The governor’s proposed budget would eliminate that increase. Now is not the time to be reducing worker retraining efforts.

Extra funding for “high-cost” training. Colleges currently have an incentive to fund lower-cost training programs, even if business needs specialized technical training that costs more. Funding should be provided for “high-cost” areas such as nursing, where there is a critical shortage, and for apprenticeship programs.

Increase capital spending. Just as homeowners are taking advantage of historically low interest rates, so should the state to speed up capital construction in higher education and K-12 schools. Capital spending will create construction jobs now, plus the educational facilities we will need to compete in the global economy.

Results

More jobs now – more money spent in local communities.

Huge return on training – 400 percent for each training dollar spent.

Citizens get the training they need; businesses get the workers they need.

School facilities meet the challenge of a global economy.

Leadership in Emerging Sectors

Technological changes are so rapid that time is of the essence in gaining a competitive advantage. Many promising technologies have failed simply because their inventors did not know how to turn them into a successful business model. We also need to take greater advantage of our strong international ties.

Bring new technology to market. Cutting-edge research is being done in public and private facilities throughout the state. The next generation of biomedical, digital and energy technologies are being invented here. Those inventions will not lead to Washington jobs without a consistent effort to turn new technologies into successful businesses. We need to provide additional staff and seed capital to the Spokane Intercollegiate Research Technology Institute and the Washington Technology Center. In collaboration, these highly successful programs can build the economy of tomorrow.

Increase funding for college enrollments in high-demand fields and faculty retention. The future economy is a knowledge-based economy. Maintaining world-class universities is central to a strategy of inventing, refining and commercializing the technologies of tomorrow. Recognizing that funding is limited, we need to target increased enrollments to high-demand fields such as computer technology and health care. We also need to give colleges and universities the financial ability to retain top faculty.

Expand international tourism and trade. Tourism in Washington is a \$3.2 billion industry, employing more than 150,000 people, many in distressed areas. We can grow that industry through a concerted focus on international tourism. Current efforts to cultivate international tourism are not coordinated. We need an International Tourism Center that will enlist the voluntary financial participation of tourism businesses and local governments to develop and deliver a united promotional message. As international tourism increases, relationships can be turned into further business opportunities.

Results:

Washington is a leader in cutting-edge technology businesses.

Washington firms get greater access to venture capital.

Our universities remain strong competitors for research dollars since faculty quality remains high.

Students have increased access to training in high-demand fields.

International tourism is strengthened, potentially opening doors to more trade opportunities.

Faster, Focused Government

Our economic development efforts need to be like the businesses they seek to grow – lean, nimble and focused on the bottom line. Currently we divide our economic development program into dozens of individual programs. It is difficult to rapidly move resources to the areas of the greatest opportunity. We also need to speed up permit processes so that good ideas get to market more quickly.

Streamline and empower the Economic Development Commission (EDC). The current EDC, established by executive order this summer, is a good start. We can increase the EDC's effectiveness by reducing its size and increasing its power to provide policy direction to our economic development agencies. Rather than being “just another commission,” this must be a guiding body that has real power to reduce bureaucracy, help ensure that resources go to the areas of greatest good and coordinate economic development efforts for the benefit of the whole state.

Simplify permit processes. Where the rubber meets the road on most projects is the permit desk. We need to make sure that state and local permit processes are as streamlined as possible, while still protecting the environment. Recently the Department of Ecology successfully implemented a pilot project to decide 90 percent of permit applications in 90 days. The standard was clear and the response from applicants was very positive. We need to spread that standard across state government. We also need to allow other projects access to the very successful permit consolidation process used in transportation. At the local level, we need to reward local governments that have streamlined permit processes with a preference in receiving state economic development funds.

Results

Better coordinated and more accountable economic development.

Stronger links to economic development professionals in developing policy.

Clear standards and incentives for streamlined permit processes.